

Philip Worsfold
Department for Communities & Local Government

(by e-mail)

3 April 2012

Dear Philip

Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request

We had correspondence earlier this year about a request your Department received for release of minutes of the meeting that took place on 18 October 2011 between the Secretary of State, Baroness Hanham and the LGA Chairman and Group Leaders.

You subsequently decided to release a redacted version of these minutes, and we are aware that the record has been quoted in the national press, in particular referring to Cllr Vernon-Jackson's comments about the council tax student exemption. As I noted in my letter to you of 16 January, whilst your version of the minutes largely accords with the version that we hold here, which I prepared and circulated confidentially to the LGA members attending the meeting, the two versions are not identical – nor would anyone expect them to be.

In particular, our version, which was prepared and circulated on the same day as the meeting took place, records Cllr Vernon-Jackson's comments about council tax benefit localisation as follows: "Cllr Vernon-Jackson added that the proposals in the consultation paper ran the risk of concentrating the cut in council tax benefit on a relatively small group of around 1.3m claimants of working age, who might pay around £330 more per household. It would be much better to spread the extra cost over 14 million people who benefitted from a wide range of discounts and exemptions, because the individual household loss would then reduce to an average 60p per week. With the student exemption, for example, a possible solution would be to charge landlords business rates. Furthermore, putting councils in charge of face to face delivery would bring significant advantages over relying on JobCentre Plus".

By contrast, the Department's record contains the statement that "GVJ concurred with SMC, Local Authorities should have greater discretion over Council Tax exemptions and discounts, such as the student exemption".

We would ask you to note that we regard our record of Cllr Vernon-Jackson's comments as accurately summarising the comments on the council tax student exemption that he made at the meeting. Please will you amend your note of the meeting accordingly, and

make our view of what was said clear in the event you should receive further requests for this information.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Stephen Jones". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized "S" and "J".

Stephen Jones